

September 6, 1979 Statement

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We feel that we must respond to the latest in a series of attempts to suppress inquiry into the details and nature of Gloria Steinem's association with the Central Intelligence Agency. We are alarmed that the most visible commentary on these events has come from several well-known figures in the feminist movement who not only condone but endorse this suppression. Because feminism's appeal and impact spring from a fundamental intellectual honesty, it is particularly distressing that the suppression of dissent may be seen as some kind of official feminist position.

In 1975, after Redstockings researched Gloria Steinem's affiliations and raised questions about her political past, Steinem published a "Statement" in connection with her activities on behalf of the Independent Research Service, a CIA-funded group. Many feminists found this document neither entirely credible nor to the point, and they have persisted in seeking more enlightening answers.

Because of the consciously counterrevolutionary role the CIA has played at home and abroad over the years, it makes sense to expect a participant in the women's movement—especially one who has come to symbolize it—to fully discuss her past relationship to the CIA. We are still waiting to hear Steinem's opinion of the Agency; the last one she gave characterized the CIA as "liberal" and "farsighted" (*The New York Times*, February 21, 1967).

The events that prompted us to send out this letter include:

- 1) Gloria Steinem, Clay Felker (most recently publisher of *Esquire*), and Ford Foundation president Franklin Thomas were among those who threatened to sue for libel if Random House allowed the CIA chapters to be published in the Random edition of Redstockings' *Feminist Revolution*. At the same time, *Newsweek/Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham and Warner Communications—a major Ms. stockholder—also complained. The offending chapters were deleted. Thus, Steinem and her powerful supporters successfully used the threat of litigation to exercise prior restraint over publication.

- 2) When Steinem learned that the *Village Voice* had assigned journalist Nancy Borman to prepare an article on the censorship of *Feminist Revolution*, her attorneys, Greenbaum, Wolff & Ernst, threatened suit against the *Voice* if any mention of Steinem's CIA association appeared in the article. After some delay to allow the *Voice*'s legal counsel to review the material, the *Voice* published the article (May 21, 1979), and in subsequent issues several letter-writers responded with attacks on Borman and the *Voice*.

Gilda Abramowitz, New York City
Dee Alpert, NYC
R. L. Annchild, NYC
Marion Banzhaf, Washington, DC
Bea Baron, Bronx, NY
Jane Barry, Philadelphia
Pat Barry, Philadelphia
Rosalyn Baxandall, NYC
Frances M. Beal, Brooklyn, NY
Harriet Bernstein, Philadelphia
Louise Billotte, San Francisco
Nancy Borman, NYC
Gayle M. Brauner, LaGrande, Ore.
Lynne Carlo, NYC
Eileen Casey, Brooklyn
Susan P. Chizeck, Princeton, NJ
Cindy Cisler, NYC
Heather Cottin, Bayville, NY
Coca Crystal, NYC
Agnes Cunningham, NYC
Ann C. Davidson, Philadelphia
Charlotte Dennett, NYC
Carole DeSaram, NYC
Hodee W. Edwards, Oakland, Calif.
Dorothy Engleman, NYC
Nancy S. Erickson, Brooklyn

Lisa Forman, Warrington, Pa.
Harriet Fraad, New Haven, Conn.
Carol Giardina Freeman, Jacksonville, Fla.
Elizabeth Griggs, NYC
Sara Grusky, Washington, DC
Stephanie Haftel, Rochester, NY
Carol Hanisch, New Paltz, NY
Carole Heath, Rochester
Judith Lewis Herman, Cambridge, Mass.
Nellie Hester, NYC
Jan Hillegas, Jackson, Miss.
Susan-Leigh Jeanchild, West Palm Beach, Fla.
Patricia Korbet, NYC
Janet Kruzik, Jackson Heights, NY
Lavonne Lela, Rochester
Barbara Leon, Gardiner, NY
Sherry Lipsky, Philadelphia
Pamela Lloyd, NYC
Rita Loughlin, NYC
Kathleen Maynard, Gainesville, Fla.
Charlotte J. McEwen, Ottawa
Aurora Levins Morales, Berkeley, Calif.
Janet Mulkeen, NYC
Amina Muñoz, NYC
Donna O'Sullivan, Prince Albert, Sask.
Marge Piercy, Wellfleet, Mass.

3) In May 1979, when *Heights & Valley News*, a New York City neighborhood paper published by the Columbia Tenants Union, began a series on the material deleted from *Feminist Revolution*, Steinem's attorneys again threatened suit. But instead of threatening the Columbia Tenants Union corporation—as they had the Random House and Village Voice corporations—they sent a letter to each of CTU's 32 board members. Board members cannot be individually sued for a corporation's acts, except in a few instances not relevant here (many non-lawyers may not know this); but Steinem's attorneys stated in their letter to the board members that publication of the material "could subject [them] to individual liability." *Heights & Valley News* stood up to this attempt at intimidation and is continuing the series.

All this legal harassment was in response not to any actual instance of false, malicious defamation, but to the potential raising of embarrassing questions about some feminists' relations with the power elite.

We think that Steinem and her associates have not made a convincing case for cutting off discussion. At question is not just the right to debate one woman's past associations, although this is often important. There is an urgent need for wide-ranging debate in the feminist movement on such questions as:

- Do feminists think there are special topics on which it is defensible to stifle discussion? Why do we put up with bad-faith appeals to "sisterhood"?
- How far should feminists go in making compromises? Which kinds of compromises help us reach our goals? Which hurt?
- Is there a conflict-of-interest problem that our movement needs to solve—as other movements have tried to solve it—when movement representatives accept positions on the government or corporate side of the bargaining table?
- Are "right-wingers" the only reason for the growing number of setbacks for women? Or is the feminist movement failing to discuss its own serious mistakes?
- Does dependence on government and corporate funding and foundation grants increase or decrease the effectiveness of feminist groups? Does it distort their politics and activities?
- What is to be done about government and corporate spying and intervention in the feminist movement?

These questions are not personal but political. They are at the heart of our survival as a movement. We will not be silenced.

Copies of the two articles reviewing Steinem's CIA associations, which were in the original edition of *Feminist Revolution*, are available for \$2 from Redstockings, P.O. Box 1284, New York, NY 10009; Redstockings' information packet on the censorship of the book's Random edition is \$2. Copies of the Sept. 6, 1975, *Majority Report*, containing Steinem's state-

ment and annotations to it, are \$7.75 each from *Majority Report*, 49 Perry St., New York, NY 10014. Copies of the *Voice* article and letters of response are \$5.50, cash or stamps, from the Statement Group, c/o Redstockings.

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